

History of St. Augustine Catholic School

St. Augustine Parish and School traces its heritage to 1858 and the efforts of a group of dedicated emancipated Black Catholics. Faced with a society that was not yet willing to put off the last vestiges of slavery and a church that, at best, tolerated the presence of Black people in its congregation, these men and women founded a school and chapel on 15th Street under the patronage of Blessed Martin de Porres. This school began operations four years before mandatory free public education of Black children became law in the Nation's Capital.

After the Civil War briefly interrupted operations, a new church was built and dedicated to St. Augustine in 1876. From its beginning, St. Augustine was the parish of Black Catholics in Washington, D.C., and the tradition of lay effort and determination flourished.

The Oblate Sisters of Providence, the oldest religious order of Black Women in the United States, staffed the school from its earliest days.

The Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary began in May of 1892 and continues to this day as an active organization of lay women in the parish.

The parish continued to grow and flourish with a strong commitment to education and good liturgy until February 1928, when, under the pastorship of Fr. Alonzo Olds, the parish purchased the site of the Washington Home for Children at 1715 15th Street as the new home of St. Augustine's Parochial School.

A school, rectory and convent were soon built and the construction of a new church was begun. Most of the parish activities and operations were moved to 15th and S Streets NW while the church building at 15th and M Streets was maintained and used until 1946, when it was sold by the Archdiocese of Washington.

One of St. Augustine's neighbors was a large Catholic parish, St. Paul, with many members of Irish and German descent. With the rise of integration, membership at St. Paul steadily dwindled until 1961, when Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle of Washington decreed that the parishes of St. Paul and St. Augustine would be united.

In 1979, the parish, through the parish council, pastoral staff, and the Archbishop of Washington, made a decision to sell the property at 15th and S Streets NW. The Archdiocese of Washington decided to renovate the buildings and consolidate the school and other parish ministries of St. Paul and Augustine Church at 15th and V Streets NW.

On November 12, 1982, Archbishop James Hickey decreed that the Church of St. Paul and Augustine would again be called the Parish of St. Augustine.

In 2002, St. Augustine School became part of the Center City Consortium. Central to a project called *Faith in the City*, the Consortium's mission is to make "a difference for the children of our parishes and communities by providing educational excellence rooted in the values of our living Catholic Faith."

In 2008, St. Augustine School left the Center City Consortium – now known as the Consortium of Catholic Academies – and became a parish-based Catholic school once again, defeating a proposal to have St. Augustine School converted into a public charter school, along with seven other formerly Catholic parish schools in Washington, D.C.